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SERIOUS
ADVICE and DIRECTIONS

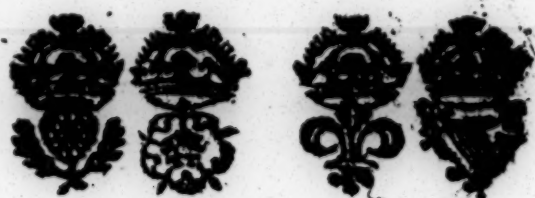
To ALL, Especially to
YOUNG PEOPLE,

HOW THEY MAY
Hear and Read

THE
WORD of GOD,

That it may be the Saviour of LIFE,
and not of DEATH to them.

4 Mark 24. Take heed what ye hear.
8 Luke 18. Take heed how ye hear.



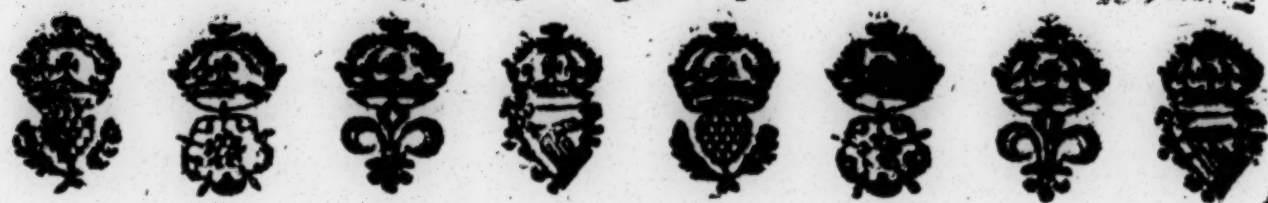
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THE INTRODUCTION.

AS the Holy Scriptures (which the Apostle tells us, are able to make us wise to Salvation, if duly priz'd and improv'd) are (next the giving of Christ to die for us) the greatest Gift that ever GOD bestowed upon a Nation or Person, and which advances them above all other Nations and People in the World, Psalm 147. 19, 20. So there is nothing wil bring sorer Judgements, Spiritual, Temporal, and Eternal, than the Neglect or Misimprovement of these Oracles of GOD, it wil not only level such Persons with Heathens, but with the vilest of them another Day; as our Saviour has forewarned us, Matth. 11. 24. It shal be more tolerable in the Day of Judgement for Sodom and Gomorrah, than for such who do not duly receave and entertain the Gospel for those Ends it was given of GOD; It is a wonderful thing to consider how scrupulous and fearful many People are of Receaving the Lord's Supper, lest they should Eat and Drink their own Damnation, and yet even these Persons wil make nothing of careles and unprofitable Hearing and Reading the Word of GOD, or neglecting and slighting the same, which as certainly ruines them at last, as unworthy Receaving: And therefore these Directions are earnestly recommended to all, especially Young Persons, that they may not be guilty of their own Eternal Ruine, and make that Word, which, in its own nature, is The Saviour of Life unto Life, to be unto them The Saviour of Death unto Death.

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Advice and Directions to All,
Especially to
YOUNG PEOPLE, &c.

In Psalm 119. 9. The Question is asked, Wherewithal shall a Young Man cleanse his Way? the Answer is, By ruling himself (or taking heed thereto) according to thy Word.

IT is plain from hence, that Young Mens Ways or Courses are corrupt and filthy, and the only Means of cleansing them is God's Word, by which they must Rule and Regulate their Wayes, (that is) their Thoughts, Words, and Actions; and therefore, because the Word of God is Spiritual, and contradicts the headstrong Lusts of young Persons, they do not love to read or meditate on it; how few will seriously apply themselves to the Reading of a Chapter or two in a day, tho' they have time enough to read Stories, Romances, or other foolish Books and Papers; which are agreeable to their Lusts; So if they hear the Word Preached, which is the ordinary Means that God has appointed for their Conversion, it is more out of Custom than Love; and when they come home from Hearing, they forget all they have received, by falling into vain and foolish Talking, & not allowing themselves any time for Meditation, till at last they grow hardened in their Sins, and the Word of God will have no Impression upon them, and youthfull Lusts lead them captive to their Destruction.

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Therefore as Young Persons would not be guilty of their Souls eternal Ruine, they must take care that they do not neglect Hearing and Reading the Word, or hear and Read to no Purpose, which is as bad or worse; To this end I do earnestly advise such as can write, to keep a Paper-Book, and write down the heads of every Sermon, with the Text and Proofs, and so much of the rest of the Sermon as they can well write, an Example whereof to direct them, I have hereafter written down in this Paper; also Patterns or Directions for Prayer before and after Sermon.

A Prayer before Sermon.

MOST glorious God, thro' the Riches of thy Grace, thou hast given Me another Opportunity to wait upon thee at thy House, and thou hast commanded Me to take heed how I hear, I most humbly beseech thee to make my Heart fit to receive the good Seed of thy Word: Lord, I desire to lay my Soul open to the Sword of thy Spirit, beseeching thee to make it to Me quick and poverful, sharper than any two-edged Sword, to kil all my Sins and Lusts, especialy My right-eye and right-hand sins, which I pray thee discover to Me, and make Me willing freely to deliver up to thee, to be crucified and slain. Be with thy Servant, upon whose Ministry I am to attend; give him a door of Utterance, that he may Preach thy Word faithfully and plainly, not with In-ting Words of Mens Wisdom, but in the demonstration of the Spirit and of Power, and let thy good Spirit carry it from his Mouth to My Heart, that I may come to be convinced of the Sins of My Heart and Life, and that these Convictions may end in true godly Sorrow, that may Work Repentance unto Salvation, never to be repented of, and all for the Merits of Christ Jesus Our Lord. Amen.

The like PRAYER may be used before Reading of Chapters, with a little Variation.

The

The Heads of a Sermon.

1 Pet. 1. 3, 4. *Blessed be the God and Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ, who, according to his abundant Mercy hath begotten us again by the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, &c.*

ONE of the great Benefits that come to us by the Resurrection of Christ, is the New Birth. *Who hath begotten us again.*

Regeneration is the first saving Work upon us, it was the first Lesson Christ taught so Learned a Man as Nicodemus.

First, I shall explain what is meant by Regeneration, Secondly, &c. Thirdly, &c. Application.

It signifies a Moral Change, not of the Substance, but of the Qualities of the Soul, called in Scripture also Conversion, Sanctification, &c.

It is that great Change wrought upon us by the Spirit of God, whereby God's Image, lost by the Fall, is again renewed upon us, and We are turned from a State of Sin to a State of Holiness, *Acts 26. 18. See Ephes. 4. 21* I shall explain it more in six Particulars.

1st. Begetting again, supposes a former Birth, and that we must be twice born; in our first Birth we were born in Sin, and Childrea of Wrath; The first Birth brought us into the World Sinners, the second makes us Saints; Our first Birth makes us Men, the second Birth makes us Christians.

2ly. This new Birth is the Work of God alone, none can Regenerate us but God, He that made us Creatures can only make us new Creatures, *Ja. 1. 18.* It is a work of as great Power to make a Sinner a Saint, as to make Him a Man; I know there are some civil Persons, that as our Saviour saith, are not far from the Kingdom of God; but yet I say, there's no Man, by the greatest Improve-
ments

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ments of Learning, Nature, or Reason, can make him-
self a Saint no more, than a Man can beget himself.

3ly. Regeneration is a Work of free Grace and Mer-
cy; of his own will beget he us by the word of Truth,
as 2 *Tim.* 2. 19. *Tit.* 3. 5.

4ly. Tho' God alone doth Regenerate us, yet he makes
Use of Means, which are two; first, the Preaching of the
Word, *St. James* saith, *James* 1. 18. he beget us by the
Word of Truth. And therefore we must attend the
Preaching of the Word, it is not Peoples staying at Home
or walking in the Fields, and saying God can save them
if he will, will do them any good. The other means is
Baptism, which is called the washing of Regeneration,
Titus 3. 5.

5ly. The principal working on God's part, is the pour-
ing out of the Holy Ghost, to be the Soul or Principle of
this new Life in us; those Graces of the Spirit whereby
the Soul is first healed, and then Sanctified, a partaking
of the Divine Nature, as *Rom.* 8. 11. Unregenerate
Persons may have the Gifts, the Assistances and Moti-
ons of the Spirit, but not have the Spirit dwell in them
as a Principle of New Life.

6ly. When God hath thus Regenerated us, there fol-
lows a great change in the Soul, just like a new Life
put into a dead Body, which is presently followed
with Breathing, Walking and Actions; so he that is
new Born, has a new Understanding, a new Judgement,
a new Sense of Things; He now sees the Excellency
of *Christ*, and the Beauty of Holiness, the loathsome
Nature of Sin; He has now new Loves, new Joys, a
new end of this Life, and an Inclination and Purpose
to serve God in every thing, and then a new Life fol-
lows a new Heart:

It is called *A New Birth*, or being *Begotten again*;
1st. Because it is an inward vital Change; Life be-
gins first in the Heart, as *Ezek.* 36. 26. and *Jer.* 31. 31.
2ly.

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2ly. Regeneration is an universal Change; when the Soul of Man is infused, it goes thro' every Member of the Body; so the Spirit of God sanctifies the whole Man, and therefore he will not live in any known Sin.

3ly. This new Birth implies a constant and prevailing Change; natural Actions are constant. Regeneration is the distinguishing Act of God's electing Love; had we died but one Hour before we had been born again, we should have been undone for ever.

Application.

This should stir you up to examin your selves; you that have not felt this great Work upon Your hearts, do you not believe that you have Immortal Souls, that must be miserable or happy for ever? do you believe ther's no way to Life, but by the new Birth; what Pillow can you rest upon in an unconverted State? me thinks that Text of our Saviour, *John 3. 3. Except a man be born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God,* should follow you in all your Callings and Recreations: Arise therefore and Repent of your Sins, make you new Hearts and new Spirits.



Most Persons that have any Readiness in Writing, may take thus much of a Sermon; they that cannot, let them at first take only the Heads of the Sermon, which begin with 1, 2, 3, 4, &c. this may easily be done; and afterwards, when they grow more expert, they may enlarge farther. When you come home from Church, read what you have written, and seriously consider, and meditat upon it, and then turn Your Meditation into some such Prayer as this which follows.

A PRAYER

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A Prayer after Hearing the WORD.

Most gracious Lord, I, thy poor unworthy creature, desire in all Humility, to bless thy holy name, that notwithstanding My great Unthankfulness and Unprofitableness under the Means of Grace, thou hast given Me one Opportunity more to Wait upon thee in thy House, and to partake of thy Holy Word; O let the same Make a deep and a lasting Impression on My Soul, and not be left to the Vanity of My Spirit. I have now been taught the Nature & Necessity of the New Birth, that it is a through Change of the Heart, Wrought by the Holy Ghost, to turn us from Sin to God; That it is the Work of Him alone that Made us to new-make us; and there's no Hopes of Heaven, or escaping Hell, until this great Work be Wrought in My Heart. **LORD,** I am a poor ignorant sinful Creature, unable to conceive this great Mystery of Regeneration, and am ready in My Heart to say with Nicodemus, How can these things be? I beseech thee let Me know by Experience, what it is to be Born again; To be made a new Creature. Oh give Me thy Holy Spirit to work this great Change in Me. Let Him Break or Melt My hard Heart into true Contrition and Godly Sorrow for My Sins, and shew Me the Necessity of an Interest by Faith in the Blood of Jesus Christ who is the Saviour of all penitent Sinners; Amen.

Or otherways You may turn the several Heads of your Sermon into a Prayer, and so You will have the whole Substance of the Sermon, and a Direction for Prayer, which will be more easie and profitable; As for Example, In the first Head of the Sermon it is there expressed, that the first Birth brought us into the World Sinners, the second makes us Saints; the first Birth makes us Men, the second Christians. When I Read this, I lift up my Heart to GOD in Prayer, after some such Manner,
O blessed

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O Blessed LORD, am I born a miserable Sinner, and do continue such till I am Born again? O let me give no Rest to My Soul till this Work be wrought in Me. Oh let Me not rest in an Outward Profession, when I have no true Godliness in My Heart.

So in the second Head I read, that this New Birth is the Work of GOD alone, and the same Power that made us Creatures, must make us new Creatures: Then I lift up my Soul to God in this manner;

O LORD, I beseech Thee, put forth that mighty Power whereby Thou madest Me a Creature, to make me a new Creature. LORD, I can only wait upon Thee in the Use of Means. it is the mighty Power of thy Grace must make them effectual to the Convincing and Converting me: Carry on this Work in my Soul, against all the Oppositions of my wicked Heart, the World and the Devil, and give Me Grace to improve every Motion of thy good Spirit, and never to Quench the same.

Thus You may easily go over all the other Heads of the forementioned Sermon, or of any other Sermon you write, or of any Chapter or Verse you read in private.



The Spiritual Advantages to such as take this Course of Writting Sermons.

First, **I**T will be a great Means to make you attend with more Diligence upon the Word, & prevent all wandring Thoughts; This will certainly engage your Attention, and cause your Mind to be fixed, that you may not be guilty of Offering the Sacrifice of Fools

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Fools, to have your Body present, and your Hearts running after Vanity.

2ly. This Course will keep your bodily Eyes from wandering, and looking upon Faces or fine Cloaths in the Church, which distracts the Mind.

3ly. This Writing and Praying will be an excellent Means to furnish your Soul with Divine Truths, and such as will remain and abide with you, to direct you in your Life; a man that takes this Course, shall have benefit by a Sermon, and remember it perhaps many Years after, when a careless slothfull Hearer shall forget all in few Hours; that Sermon that we do Pray into our Hearts shall do us good, and none else. For want of this, how many Persons are there that have been Hearers of good Sermons, it may be 10. 20. 30. or 40. Years, and yet after all, know no more of their Religion than a meer Heathen, or at least it is but very general and uncertain, not anything that has an influence upon their Hearts and Lives; and no wonder if such as would not receive the Truth in the love of it, that they may be saved, in a day of temptation, should be given over to believe lies that they may be damned.

Fourthly. By this means you will be able to resist all Temptations to Sin and Errors, that you are always liable to; whether from within, or from without, you will say to your selves, I remember this or that Sin, or false Doctrine, was forbidden in such a Sermon, & the Judgments of God denounced against it; & as Joseph, when he was tempted by his Mistress; so you will say, *How can I do this wickedness, and sin against God?* and this likewise will be a good means to incite and stir you up to all good Duties, that God requires of you; and hereby you may be very useful to others with you, by reading the Heads of your Sermon to them, and promote holy Conference, which is a Duty God Requires, and will reward: it is said *Thy that feared the Lord, spake often one to another;* and

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and by this Course a great deal of Precious time will be redeemed on Lords days, which many young persons do vainly squander away in idle and unprofitable Discourse

And forasmuch as there are several Persons that can Read, but not write, and if the Question be asked, what must these do to profit by reading the Scriptures and hearing Sermons? I answer (as to reading) let such or others, when they read a Chapter, diligently meditate upon it, & turn the several Verses into holy Ejaculations or Prayers; many of the *Psalms* are already made Prayers to their hands, and they may use them in the same Form and Words as they lye in the Bible; as for Example, *Psal. 139. 23, 24. Search me, O God, and know my Heart: try me, and know my Thoughts, and see if there be any wicked Way in me: and lead me in the Way everlasting.* And other verses, that are only Affirmations of truths, they may easily turn into Prayers; As for Example, when I read that passage, *Mat. 1. 21. where it's said, And he shall bring forth a Son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins,* I lift up my Heart to God in some such Prayer as this, *O blessed Jesus, it was thy great design and end of coming into the World to save Souls, and to that end to save sinners from their sins, which are the destroyers of Souls. O do thou save me from all my sins, especially such and such Sins as I am most inclined to.*

And then as to Hearing of Sermons, such Persons as cannot write, may take their Bibles and turn down the Text, and the several Proofs and other Scriptures that are Quoted for the Confirmation or Illustration of the Doctrine that is insisted upon; and when they go home, they may seriously meditate on them in order, one after another, and as they see Occasion turn them into such Ejaculations and Prayers as above; and this will also be a means to bring much of the Sermon to their Memories, which they have forgotten.

I hope

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I hope these Arguments are sufficient Motives for such Young Men or other persons that are desirous to follow the best Ways and means for the good of their Souls, to take up this Course.

Objection. But it may be some young Persons, that are careless of their own Souls, will object and say, there is too much trouble in this Course.

Ans. It is very plain, that the trouble is very little, and to such as truly love their Souls, it is a pleasure; if you cannot undergo such a trouble, how can you forsake all things for Christ.

Object. But some may say again, Do not most People content themselves, without taking any such Course, and may not a man be a good Christian without it?

Ans. If you will follow the Way that *Most* go in, then I have little hope to prevail with you in this or any other Matter that concerns your Souls, for the *Most* go the broad Way that leads to Destruction; but I do not say, it is necessary for all People to take this Course, but I chiefly mean it for Youth, whose Hearts and Memories are deceitful and treacherous, and cannot keep a Sermon or Heads of it with them, so as after to meditate on the same, and improve it by Prayer; I say therefore, tho' it be not necessary for all, yet it is necessary for such, and very convenient and Profitable to all others that will set themselves to it.

Object. It may be some may say again, I am unskillful, I know not how to set about it.

Ans. Have but a Will, and in a little time you will have Skill. In short, all Objections are vain and frivolous, and only shew the Backwardness in you to those things that may advance your Soul's Good, and that you have so much the more need of taking up this Course.

If GOD shall incline your Hearts, to undertake this Work, then take this Advice by way of Caution.

First. Be very serious before you make a beginning, and pray earnestly to GOD, that he will make this Course profitable to your Souls Health.

Secondly, Having resolved to set upon it, do not suffer your vain deceitfull Hearts, the World or the Devil, to make you give over again, for you will find opposition from all, or some of these, but still hold on, & remember you have, upon good Reasons, found it very necessary for you, and therefore you will not give it over, till you have, by the Grace of GOD, obtained benefit by it.

Thirdly, Have a Care you do not rest in a formal Use of this Course, but remember, tho' you should follow such a Course never so long, yet if you find no Spiritual Benefit, nor that you have been brought by this Means from a State of Sin and Folly, to a State of Grace and Holiness, all you have done, will do you no good; remember this is not to be done for it self, but for another end and purpose, namely, that your Soul may be renewed and changed, that you may be Born again, & see the Kingdom of GOD.

Lastly, and especially, I do advise all Persons, as they ever hope for any Saving-benefit of Hearing or Reading the Word, to Pray diligently and constantly for a renewed and sanctified Heart, without which, though they should arrive to some Notional Knowledge in the Head, it would do them little good, nor will they keep it long. The Word of God is holy, and will not remain or abide long any where, but in a holy Heart. And therefore Solomon advises, *Prov. 2. 1. (My Son, forget not my Law, but let thine Heart keep my Commandments.)*

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ments) As it he should have said, You will quickly forget all, if you do not lay it up in your Heart. It is a good Heart that makes a good Memory.

Now I have done; and unless you can give me better Reasons for the Neglect of this Way, than I have given you for the Observation of it, I do hereby, with the greatest earnestness; out of a true love to your Souls, and from some good self-experience, beseech and intreat you that you would without delay resolve, in the fear of GOD, to make a serious and sober Tryal, and then I am sure you will have great cause to thank God for this Counsel. And, as a farther Motive, remember, that GOD Almighty takes care to write down in the Book of his Omniscience, all the Sermons you ever heard, and Chapters you have read, and how you have remembered and improved them to his Glory, and the good of your Souls. And what a sad account will every careless Hearer and Reader have to make in the great Day of Judgement when GOD shall say, Come, Sinner, I gave thee so many Years to live upon Earth, I afforded thee all the means of Grace; and especially this of Reading and Hearing my Word Preached; thou hast heard so many hundred Sermons, wherein thou hast been acquainted with the Necessity of a new Heart, a New Life, now what Improvements and Earnings hast thou made of all these Precious Talents: Believe this for a certain Truth those Sermons You will not now remember to your Salvation, you shall then remember to your Condemnation, when your remembrance will do you no good.

Directions for Reading Holy Scripture.

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Elkling.

HEN You have said your morning Prayer, you may then go chearfully to your Study; and rely upon the Divine Goodness for a

But

Directions, Ejaculations, &c. 15

But first if you have time I advise you to Read some short *Psalm* or peice of a Chapter out of the *Gospel*, or Historical Books, because thy are the most easie to be understood; remembering the Example of young *Timothy*, who was bred up to know the Scripture from a Child, 2 *Tim.* 3. But if you want time in ordinary days, to read the Scripture, be sure to read somewhat of it on Sundays and Holydays; and take care that you daily read a portion of it before Dinner and Supper, and at Night when you are Just going to Bed, that you may close the Day with Holy Thoughts, and if you hearken diligently to it when it is read, you do in effect read it your self. Now to make your reading the more profitable to you, begin with one or more of these Ejaculations.

Ejaculations before Reading Holy Scripture.

WHerewithall, Lord, shall a Young Men cleanse his way? even by ruling himself after thy Word, *Psal.* 119. Lord open my Eyes that I may see the wonderful things of thy Law, O Heavenly Father! I humbly beg thy Holy Spirit so to help me at this time to read, and understand, and remember, and Practise thy Word, that it may make me wise to Salvation.

When you are thus prepared, then begin to Read, and consider, that it is God's most Holy Word You Read; and that all the while you are reading, God is speaking to you, and therefore read with attention and humility and endeavour as much as you can, to suit Your Affection to the subject you read. For instance, if you read any of God's Commands, they should excite in you a Zeal to keep them. If you read any of God's threatenings against Sinners, or his Judgments on them, they should

should excite in you a fear to provoke him. When you read any of his gracious Promises, they should encourage and Quicken Your Obedience. When You Read any of God's Mercies, they should excite You to Thanksgiving. When You Read of any great Mystery recorded in Holy Writ, You are to prostrate Your Reason to Divine Revelation.

And to this purpose, in the midst of your Reading, say,
 Lord give me Grace to obey this Command; or
 Lord deliver me from this Sin, or this Judgement; or
 Lord, I rely on this good Promise; or
 Glory be to Thee, O Lord, for this Mercy; or
 Lord, I believe and adore this Mystery.

Say any of these, according as best agrees with the Subject you read; and when you have read as much as conveniently you can, conclude with one of these Ejaculations.
 Blessed be Thou, O Lord, O teach me thy Statutes!
 Lord, make thy Word a Lanthorn unto my Feet,
 and a Light unto Paths!
 Lord, make Thy Word my Delight and Counsellour.

F I N I S.

